



The Beuning Room: A Hundred and Twenty Years of Dutch Museological History*

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The Beuning Room (c. 1748) has had a turbulent history. After a century and a half in a house on Keizersgracht in Amsterdam, the room was dismantled when the building was demolished in 1896 and transferred to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1895). Eighty years later, the period room was taken apart again, only to spend more than thirty years dismembered in various museum repositories. This situation ended when the Rijksmuseum borrowed some parts of the room for an exhibition about rococo in the Netherlands in 2001-02. During the renovation of the Rijksmuseum, the ensemble was acquired on long-term loan, restored and reconstructed (2006-13). Since the museum reopened in 2013, visitors have been able to look round the period room in the 1700-1800 department on the first floor as An Amsterdam Canal House Room (see figs. on pp. 18-27), otherwise known as the Beuning Room.

This latest presentation reflects increasing interest in Dutch domestic culture – conceived as the arrangement, furnishing and use of private houses – since 2001, the ‘Year of the Interior’. Since then various publications have been devoted to Dutch domestic culture and period interiors. In the same year the

Rijksmuseum staged an exhibition, *Rococo: A Riot of Ornament*, in which elements of the Beuning Room were shown after years in storage.¹ Since 2012, Margriet van Eikema Hommes has been heading research into historic interiors with wall-sized paintings as part of the five-year project *From Isolation to Coherence*.

The international growth in interest coincided with the inclusion of historical interiors and ‘period rooms’ in museums. Trevor Keeble’s *The Modern Period Room* (2006) contains a selection of essays in which architects, historians of architecture and curators discuss interiors and period rooms. In *Moving Rooms*, the architecture historian John Harris regards the period room as ‘movable property’.² And Amanda Vickery’s research, which concentrates on the domestic culture of the Georgian house and household, drew a large audience for a BBC TV series on the subject in 2010.³ In national and international conferences historians embarked on a debate about the exhibition concept of the ‘period room’, for instance during *The Period Room Museum, Material, Experience* in the Bowes Museum (2014) and at the *1:1 Period Rooms* exhibition in Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam (2015).

What is a Period Room?

The 'period room' is an exhibition concept museums have used ever since the nineteenth century. In practice there is no uniform definition, so a chronological analysis of the concept would seem appropriate.

In the Netherlands the historical exhibitions in the second half of the nineteenth century are seen as the forerunners.⁴ The *Historical Exhibition of Amsterdam* (1876) staged by the Royal Antiquarian Society (KOG) showed a fully furnished, seventeenth-century room, bedroom and kitchen and an eighteenth-century furnished room.⁵ They were compiled by P.J.H. Cuypers, architect of the Rijksmuseum. The rooms were put together in one particular style and open to the public. This heightened the immediacy of the experience and was a striking innovation.⁶ A number of 'period rooms' were also displayed at the *Historical Exhibition of Friesland* (1877), the best-known of which was furnished entirely in the Hindeloper style with mannequins dressed in traditional Frisian costumes.⁷ Like Cuypers's historical rooms, the Hindeloper Room was put together from individual elements, and visitors could walk into it.

Assembling and furnishing rooms was interpreted more broadly at arts and crafts exhibitions and world fairs, in an endeavour to project a national sense of style.⁸ The exhibitions in Amsterdam (1877), Arnhem (1879) and The Hague (1888), for example, showed objects from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Dutch Golden Age.⁹ The Hindeloper Room was again the example in the Dutch exhibit at the 1878 Paris world fair.¹⁰

The first presentation of historical rooms in a museum was in the Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst set up in the Rijksmuseum in 1887. The Museum van Kunstnijverheid in Haarlem followed suit in 1891. Rather than 'period rooms', these rooms were more specifically called

'seventeenth-century' kitchen or 'sixteenth-century' room. Other terms encountered on floor plans and in correspondence up to 1935 include 'old rooms', 'historical room', 'panelling', 'luxuriously carved room' and 'room panelling'.¹¹ No references to style periods such as 'Dutch Classicism room' or 'Baroque room' have been found.

The concept of the 'period room', primarily used in the decoration and design industry, seems only to have taken root in museums around the nineteen-sixties. In his book *Stijlkamers in Nederland* (1968), Jan Schouten, director of the Gouda museums, used the term 'period room' for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century museum experience in the Netherlands and referred to the art-historical classification system based on style.¹² He made a distinction between two groups of period rooms: authentic rooms transferred in their entirety from a house to a museum setting and rooms put together from separate sources. The concept was revisited at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Cultural historian Ad de Jong, for example, introduced the new term 'ensemble'.¹³ De Jong regards Cuypers as 'the father of the "museum ensemble" in the Netherlands'.¹⁴

The terms 'original' and 'authentic' are regularly used in relation to the concept of the 'period room', referring to both the historical interior in a house and the arrangement in a museum. In the museum context it is worth considering whether a period room needs to reflect the original house and the space as a living room. These contextual changes have more or less obvious implications that affect the authentic atmosphere, such as the difference in the light direction, the adjustments to the proportions and the altered access to the room.¹⁵ Because of the conceptual move from

a house to a museum, notions of 'original' and 'authentic' appear to take on a new benchmark – the first presentation in a museum.

Another consequence of the transfer to a museum is the changed function, from various domestic roles to only one – museological. Most historical Dutch rooms were designed to impress, described as 'salons' or 'reception rooms' on the one hand, and living spaces such as 'bedrooms', 'kitchens' and 'living rooms' on the other.¹⁶ Most of the period rooms in museums of art and design are based on the prestigious ones, while those in open air museums and house museums represent the spaces for daily living. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the reception room was called the 'best room' or the 'salon'.¹⁷ These terms indicate that the room was not intended for everyday use but for important receptions. When a reception room or salon is moved to a museum, it takes on a new role. How different and diverse this could be, is demonstrated by the threefold objective of the period rooms in the *Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst* in 1887.¹⁸ The purpose of these rooms was to contextualize the collections of applied art. They also served to provide a chronological picture of cultural history in the Netherlands and reflected a desire to improve public taste.

Since it proves impossible to find a simple definition for the concept of 'period room', presentations of the Beuning Room from 1896 until now are compared by clustering the very diverse characteristics of period rooms under six headings. These are museological context, the dressing of the room, assembly from parts, opening up the room, layout with furniture, and communication. They provide a foothold for the analysis of period rooms in the Stedelijk Museum and the Rijksmuseum.

Mahogany Room in the New Stedelijk Museum (1900-c. 1971)

The first museum location of the 'salon', the present Beuning Room, was in the Suasso Wing of the newly built Stedelijk Museum (1895) in Amsterdam.¹⁹ The building of the museum was made possible by two financial windfalls: the bequest from the wealthy Amsterdam resident Sophia Adriana Lopez Suasso-de Bruijn (1816-1890) and a donation from the Van Eeghen family.²⁰ Lopez Suasso-de Bruijn had appointed the city of Amsterdam as her sole beneficiary on condition that her entire collection was shown in the museum, while the Van Eeghen family stipulated that Dutch fine artists would get a place to exhibit. The museum was consequently built to show contemporary and historical collections and stage temporary exhibitions.²¹ The Suasso Wing in the east wing of the ground floor was reserved for the Sophia Augusta Foundation's collection (fig. 1).²² Initially the rest of the museum was intended for contemporary art.

The idea of showing a series of style period rooms was conceived to frame the Sophia Augusta Foundation's collection, and resulted in an active search for historical rooms.²³ In 1896, a number of canal-side houses had to be demolished to make way for the construction of the new Raadhuisstraat. Some of the houses proved to have eighteenth-century living rooms, which the first curator Jan Eduard Van Someren Brand immediately wanted to acquire for placement in the Suasso Wing. Behind a grand nineteenth-century façade designed by the architect G.B. Salm (1863) at 187-89 Keizersgracht, the building lines and various interior elements of the Beuning family's eighteenth-century house had been preserved.²⁴ Because the new building had two entrances, the last known address of the room is 187 Keizersgracht. Salm's rebuilding initially turned the house into offices.

By the time it was demolished it was being used as a hospital, the Burger-ziekenhuis.

The 'Mahogany Room', the name for the room from 187 Keizersgracht, was the first in the series of historical rooms installed in the Suasso Wing. Given the dimensions of the panelling of the room, gallery 14 in the south-east corner pavilion was chosen to house it (fig. 1).²⁵ Gallery 14 was larger than the Keizersgracht panelling, so the panelling from two walls – the wall with the double doors and a concealed door and the wall with the fireplace and chimneypiece – were installed on false walls (figs. 1, 7). The room was eventually fitted in between two other period rooms, creating a circuit. The corridor from galleries 14 to 13 had to be moved to the right side of the wall to accommodate the room (figs. 1, 3).²⁶ Van Someren Brand suggested making display cases from the windows and window frames from the house on the canal because gallery 14 already had windows.²⁷ He may not have regarded

the original windows and frames as essential parts of the historical room. So the window wall was given a new look with a deepened bay around the existing single window, but in keeping with the existing mahogany panelling. This made the floor area more rectangular.²⁸ The smaller window would have made the Mahogany Room darker than in the original house, so it is not surprising that a ceiling light and cove lighting were added to the bay later. The original wall covering was missing, so a painted wall hanging – a 'quasi Gobelin' – was put up (figs. 6-7).²⁹ 'According to tradition' this wall hanging had come from Castle Heeswijk.³⁰ Andriessen's surviving overdoor was put back (see the articles by Van Duin and Harmanni). The last component of the room was the floor, which Van Someren Brand did not mention in the correspondence. One obvious reason could be that there was already a parquet floor made of dark matt teak in the Stedelijk Museum.³¹ The lack of reference to the floor in

Fig. 1
ADRIAAN WILLEM
WEISSMAN,
*Museum of Modern
Art/Stedelijk Museum,
Plan of the Ground
Floor, 1893.*
Amsterdam City
Archives, image no.
5221BT913250.

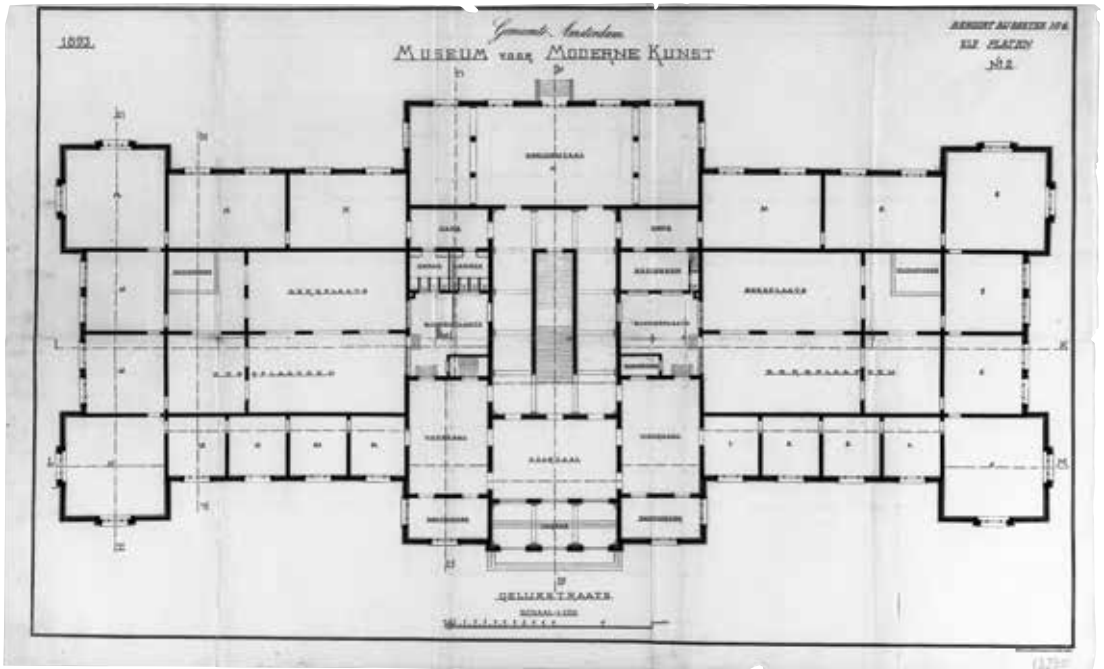




Fig. 2a
 ANONYMOUS,
The Mahogany
Room in
187 Keizersgracht,
Fireplace and
Chimneypiece,
 probably in or
 before 1896.
 Photograph,
 30 x 24 cm.
 Koninklijk
 Oudheidkundig
 Genootschap,
 inv. no. KOG-AA-60-25.

Fig. 2b
 ANONYMOUS,
The Mahogany Room
in 187 Keizersgracht,
Double Doors and
Overdoor, probably
 in or before 1896.
 Photograph,
 30.6 x 24.9 cm.
 Koninklijk
 Oudheidkundig
 Genootschap,
 inv. no. KOG-AA-60-26.

the correspondence could also mean that Van Someren Brand and the City Council attached no artistic value to the Keizersgracht floorboards, which can be seen in photographs dating from the eighteen-nineties (figs. 2a-b).

The original stucco ceiling had survived along with the costly woodwork.³² The details of the ceiling were not sharp enough to take an impression, and under pressure from the approaching demolition of the house in 1896, it was decided to remove it in its entirety.³³ Taking an impression of a ceiling was more usual than salvaging the whole thing from a house. Aside from the technical complexity and the possible damage, it was an expensive business. An original ceiling is consequently one of the most conspicuous omissions in most period rooms, and makes this historical room even more special.³⁴ The addition of a



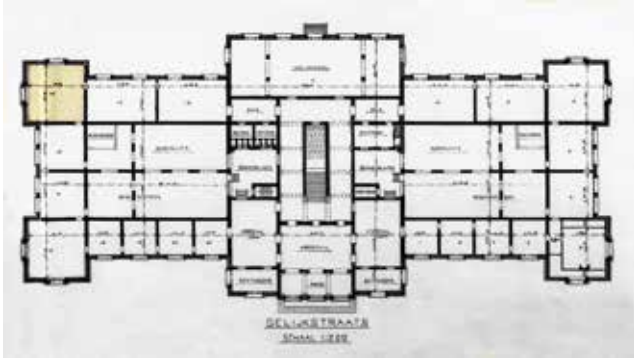


Fig. 3
ANONYMOUS,
*Stedelijk Museum,
Plan of the Ground
Floor*, date unknown.
Amsterdam City
Archives, image no.

010056919150.
Gallery 14 with an
entrance in the corner
and an entrance that
had been moved to
the other side of the

wall. Orientation:
south at the top.
Gallery 10 x 10 m.



Fig. 4
ANONYMOUS, *Floor
Plans of the Stedelijk
Museum, Ground
Floor*, detail,
1 October 1960.
Amsterdam City
Archives, inv. no.
KLAD00734000032.

Gallery 19 was made
smaller by adding
false walls, creating a
void on three sides.
The way the new
concealed door
opened is drawn in
reverse.



Fig. 5a
ANONYMOUS,
*Room 17 with the
Entrance to Room 19*,
c. 1976.
Photograph.
Amsterdam,
Stedelijk Museum,
no. M_A 11277.

Fig. 5b
ANONYMOUS,
*Fountain in the Hall
between Galleries
20 and 19*, c. 1976.
Photograph.
Amsterdam,
Stedelijk Museum,
no. M_A 11301.





Fig. 6
 ANONYMOUS,
*Wall with Fireplace,
 Chimneypiece
 and Painted Wall
 Covering, c. 1908.*
 Photograph.
 Amsterdam,
 Stedelijk Museum,
 no. M_o 2289_09.

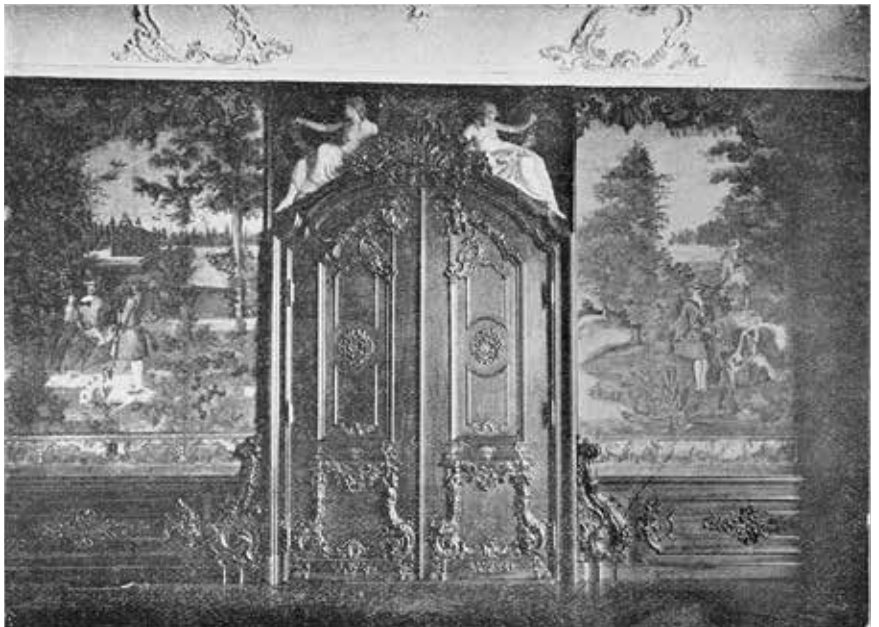


Fig. 7
 ANONYMOUS,
*Double Doors with
 Overdoor and
 Painted Wall
 Covering, c. 1908.*
 Photograph.
 Amsterdam,
 Stedelijk Museum,
 no. M_o 2072_32.
 The doors are closed
 and the doorknob is
 missing.

bay window to the room meant a new section of ceiling had to be made for it. This ceiling is not attached to the original ceiling although it was made in the same style (fig. 8).

The salon in the Keizersgracht house had two entrances: double doors to an adjoining room, the 'organ room', and a concealed door to the corridor. On an adjoining wall there was a narrower concealed door to a cupboard. The routing and entrances were freely adapted in the Stedelijk Museum. The new 'Mahogany Room' also had two entrances, but now leading to two adjacent museum galleries. The existing concealed door led to gallery 20 by way of an intermediate door and a new concealed door replacing the cupboard door led to gallery 17, a marble corridor. It was possible to make a circuit through the different

rooms by way of this last door. The double doors remained closed. One small but significant change was that the door handle was removed from the double doors. It probably ended up on the new concealed door (fig. 10).

Like all the other historical rooms in the Suasso Wing, the Mahogany Room was designed to provide the context for the Sophia Augusta Foundation's collection and represent eighteenth-century domestic culture. It is unclear whether the room was furnished. Van Someren Brand mentioned the installation of a mahogany cupboard with shelves.³⁵ However this is not shown in illustrations (figs. 6-7, 9-10) – it may have been a temporary exhibit.³⁶ The bright metal fire dogs in the fireplace are interesting; they appear in all the later photographs in the Stedelijk Museum.³⁷



Fig. 8
ANONYMOUS,
Bay with Existing
Window and a
Partially New
Plaster Ceiling
with Matching
Decoration, 1976.
Photograph.
Amsterdam,
Amsterdam
Museum Archives,
Dismantlement
logbook.



Fig. 9
 ANONYMOUS,
Mahogany Room,
 1934.
 Photograph.
 Amsterdam,
 Amsterdam Museum
 Archives, Stedelijk
 Museum portfolio.
 Ceiling light; curtains
 and a carpet.

In the museum, the period room was initially simply described as 'salon from the former Burgerziekenhuis on Keizersgracht', a reference to the last use of 187 Keizersgracht.³⁸ Later, probably before 1934, it was called the 'Mahogany Room', a reference to the expensive Cuban mahogany used for the panelling.

Louis xv Room (c. 1971-76)

Following the first two curators, Van Someren Brand (curator 1885-1904) and Baard (curator 1905-36, director from 1920), who had shown great commitment to the acquisition, installation and promotion of historical rooms, the next director David C. Röell (in post 1936-45) steered a new course. In 1938, with Röell's arrival and with Willem Sandberg as the deputy director and curator, the modernization of the building, then forty years old, was tackled.³⁹ In 1938 Sandberg had the central hall painted

white and the yellow glass in the skylight replaced with clear glass.⁴⁰ He considered the Stedelijk Museum too old-fashioned compared with the various new museums in the Netherlands, such as the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague (1935), Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam (1935), the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (1936) and the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo (1938). Sandberg took over as director after the war (serving from 1945 to 1963) and continued the modernization. Shortly after his appointment, he proposed turning the museum into a museum for modern art, so the permanent collections had to disappear from the ground floor.⁴¹ The newly available space was transformed into exhibition space.

In 1950 Sandberg also took on the post of director of Museum Willet-Holthuysen, a canal house museum.⁴² At the same time he was put in charge



of Museum Fodor and the Amsterdams Historisch Museum – a full portfolio of museums that differed greatly from one another. This created opportunities for Sandberg, who wanted to accommodate the period rooms in the Stedelijk Museum elsewhere. His first idea was to put them in the Amsterdams Historisch Museum (now the Amsterdam Museum) in the Burgerweeshuis.⁴³ This was not an option in view of the size of the rooms and the fact that they would have to be placed together. The second idea was to build a new wing in the garden behind Museum Willet-Holthuysen. Neither option ever got off the drawing board.

His successor Edy de Wilde (director 1963-85) pursued the same course. The period rooms and the Lopez Suasso family's collection were transferred to the Amsterdams Historisch Museum in 1963, the year of his appointment.⁴⁴

In the years that followed, possibilities of finding a home for the Sophia Augusta Foundation's rooms elsewhere were actively sought.⁴⁵ Simon Levie, director of the Gemeentelijke Musea, like De Wilde, played a pioneering role.

Despite the efforts to relocate, it seems that the Stedelijk Museum was also seeking alternatives. Unfortunately we know of no documentation referring to the new interpretation and its museological consequences, but there was evidently a return to the original idea of using the room as the background for the Suasso Collection. 'A layout perfectly in the style that would have been fashionable in a reception room in distinguished town houses was added to the period rooms' according to the 1976 logbook.⁴⁶ The period room was now showing a fictitious interpretation of a historical layout with objects, portraits of the

Fig. 10
VAN AGTMAAL,
Mahogany Room in
the Suasso Wing
in the Stedelijk
Museum, 1934.
Photograph.
Amsterdam City
Archives, image no.
OSIM00001001995.
A view through one
of the two 'concealed'
entrance doors to the
hall and gallery 20.
The closed double
doors now have a
round doorknob.

Fig. 11

ANONYMOUS,
*Louis xv Room with
 Open Double Doors
 and a Modern
 Display Case*,
 c. 1976.
 Photograph.
 Amsterdam,
 Amsterdam Museum
 Archive, Stedelijk
 Museum portfolio.



Lopez Suasso family and others, and furniture (figs. 11-12).

The wall covering, the quasi-Gobelin, was replaced with green cotton damask with a repeat pattern.⁴⁷ The major change was the addition of furniture and objects. The curators played around with the concept of authenticity. For the design they appear to

have looked at both the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century wall covering and layout of the salon in the Keizersgracht house (figs. 2a-b and print, see the article by Van Duin). To dress the room, however, they used elements that had nothing to do with the background of the historical salon. The room was hung with portraits of members of

Fig. 12

ANONYMOUS,
Louis xv Room,
 c. 1976.
 Photograph.
 Amsterdam,
 Amsterdam
 Museum Archive,
 Stedelijk Museum
 portfolio.



the Lopez Suasso family and portraits of the Stinstra family.⁴⁸ The furnishings and lighting were adapted as a consequence of the new vision. A modern display case in the period room was a style contrast with the historical layout. It stood behind the half-open double doors, the door on the right having been given a round doorknob (fig. 11).

At that time the room was called the 'Louis xv Room', a name that emphasized the art-historical and stylistic point of view.⁴⁹ The name was in line with those of the other period rooms in the Suasso Wing, such as the Louis XIV and Empire rooms. It also implied that it was a complete room that had been arranged purely stylistically. In fact, though, it was an interpretation of an eighteenth-century arrangement, with a wall covering inspired by the nineteenth century combined with a modern presentation of objects.

Dismantled in the Repository (1976-2006)

When the lack of space in the Stedelijk Museum became acute in 1974 and the administrative offices were housed in the former period rooms, it was the end of the road for the rooms.⁵⁰ They were dismantled in 1976 and stored in the Department of Municipal Museums repository. Before the work began, a logbook was made with a packing list, photographs and suggestions about what to take into account should the rooms be reinstalled.⁵¹

That period rooms are considered to be movable goods was already evident in 1896, when the salon was moved from 187 Keizersgracht to the Stedelijk Museum. Items, including Andriessen's overdoor and the quasi-Gobelin, had already been removed for restoration or to be stored in the repository even while the room was on display in the Stedelijk Museum.⁵² Once the period room was dismantled, each of the seven sections of the room went their separate ways. This marked the end of the room as a single entity.

A summary was made of the number of movements of the elements from the period room each year on the basis of the information on registry cards, overviews of loans in 2001 and 2006 and of the Amsterdam Museum's Adlib system.⁵³ From this summary it can be deduced that the period when the room was in the Stedelijk Museum (1900-76) was by far the quietest and the time when it was stored in separate pieces in the repository (1976-2006) was the most eventful. It further reveals that the components were mainly moved between the various Municipal Museums repositories. Lack of space, compounded by the administrative transfer of the collection to the Amsterdam Museum, must have been a factor in this. It is obvious that these frequent moves significantly increased the chance of damage and loss. From the summary it can be concluded that, contrary to what one would expect, 'the repository' was by no means a static stopping-off point for the period room.

There was a temporary liberation from the repository during the short loan to the Rijksmuseum in 2001 and 2002. In the catalogue *Rococo in Nederland*, Baarsen justified the decision to show a partial reconstruction of the Louis xv Room. Eighteenth-century architects strove to make the different components of a room, the walls, the ceiling, the furniture and objects flow into one another organically as a 'Gesamtkunstwerk'.⁵⁴ To highlight this phenomenon, the marble fireplace and chimneypiece by Jacob de Wit (1695-1754), two console tables and pier-glasses and the double doors were loaned for the exhibition *Rococo: A Riot of Ornament* (fig. 13).⁵⁵

The Amsterdam Canal House Room or Beuning Room in the Renovated Rijksmuseum (2006-present)

The current presentation of the Beuning Room is in the Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 13
 ANONYMOUS,
*Rococo: A Riot
 of Ornament*,
 2 November 2001-
 2 March 2002.
 Photograph.
 Amsterdam,
 Rijksmuseum,
 object no. HA-30447.
 Exhibition view
 with fireplace and
 pier-glasses displayed
 as separate objects.
 In the foreground
 the chandelier that
 hangs in the present
 arrangement of the
 Beuning Room.

The museum is housed in a building that has been subject to change since it opened at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ The reason for the last alteration (2003-13) was the desire to make the museum more usable, better organized and more comprehensible.⁵⁷ The motto of the remodelled layout was 'Forward with Cuypers'. This slogan is reflected in the architectural intervention by Bureau Cruz y Ortiz which restored the original symmetry of the floor plan, the partial reconstruction of Cuypers's ornamentation and the opening of the inner courtyards. The key idea for the permanent display was that painting, the decorative arts and history were no longer to be seen as isolated elements parts but integrated to tell a story about Dutch art and history.

The reappraisal of the Beuning Room had already become apparent during the rococo exhibition in 2001. Exhibiting the room's panelling and fireplace awakened a desire for more, and the idea of constructing the Beuning Room during the large-scale renovation between 2003 and 2013 took hold.⁵⁸ The champions of this process were Baarsen and Gusta Reichwein, head of the Amsterdam Museum Collection. Period rooms were not new to the Rijksmuseum; it had purchased another room, known as the Kops Room, complete with furnishings, in 1945.⁵⁹ In 2006 the Beuning Room in its entirety came to the Rijksmuseum on long-term loan. The draft loan agreement stipulated that 'everything that the Stedelijk Museum installed may be removed'.⁶⁰

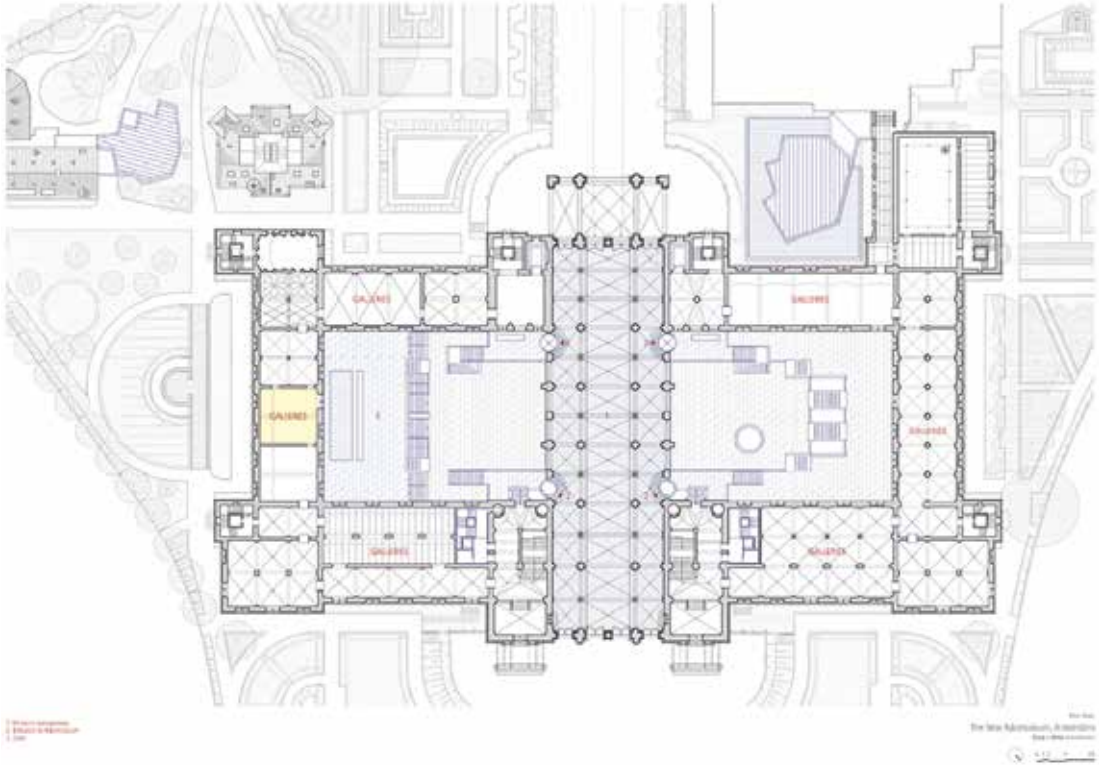


Fig. 14

Plan of the first floor of the Rijksmuseum, with highlighted the Beuning Room. Van Hoogevest Architecten, Amersfoort.

It also described the division of tasks,⁶¹ which meant that the Rijksmuseum took on the restoration and conferred with the Amsterdam Museum about which moment in the Beuning Room's history would be taken as the starting point.

The positioning of the eighteenth-century period room turned out to depend on the ideas of the Rijksmuseum's director. Under the then general director, Ronald de Leeuw (1996-2008), it was decided that the collection on view should be arranged chronologically, from the Middle Ages in the basement, upstairs by way of the west side, downstairs again via the east side and ending in the basement with the twentieth century. The eighteenth century and consequently the period room would be on the main floor.⁶² Under Wim Pijbes (2008-16) this visitors' circuit was reversed. As a result the eighteenth

century was located on the first floor. The current location of the Beuning Room is gallery 1.6 on the first floor in the east wing (fig. 14).

The layout differs from the last presentation in the Stedelijk Museum in a number of respects. To start with, the location of the room relative to the surrounding exhibition galleries has changed because of the architectural layout. The two period rooms, the Beuning Room and the Kops Room, are side by side, not a circuit. The floor plan was also changed: the bay with the single window was replaced by a straight window wall with three tall windows, creating a rectangular footprint in accordance with the original situation in the Keizersgracht house. The internal dimensions of the Beuning Room are 8.78 x 7.70 x 4.46 m.⁶³ Although the window wall has been reconstructed, it does not function as such (fig. 15). Unlike the set-up in the

Stedelijk Museum, there is no daylight in the Amsterdam Canal House Room. There are three large windows with artificial light that suggests daylight. In choosing a green wall covering of woolen damask with an eighteenth-century repeat pattern, the Rijksmuseum – probably unintentionally – echoed the room's last manifestation in the Stedelijk.⁶⁴ The woolen damask was chosen primarily to set off the mahogany.⁶⁵

Whereas the period room in the Stedelijk Museum was simply the four walls and the ceiling, in the Rijksmuseum the floor is part of it too, so that for the first time since 1900 the exhibition concept consists of six surfaces. The floorboards are soaked pine.⁶⁶ This decision appears to reflect the 'back to the Keizersgracht' vision, even though we do not know whether the floor there actually was made of pine boards.⁶⁷ The separate components in the repository had to be analysed and selected to install in the Beuning Room. A number of missing

parts had to be reconstructed. The period room is constructed around the eighteenth-century mahogany panelling, the marble fireplace and chimney-piece and the overdoor. Some of the parts added by the Stedelijk Museum have been used in the present layout, including the panelling of the concealed door and the round doorknob on one of the double doors. The Rijksmuseum has also added new elements, among them the floor, the frame of one of the concealed doors and the window wall.

The materials used for the newly added individual elements are interesting. On the one hand new additions, such as the window wall with the three sash windows and the green wall covering, harmonize with the eighteenth-century panelling in the period room, while on the other the additions stand out because of the materials or colours used, like the wooden shutters that differ subtly in terms of their finish. One decision was to show that the exterior of the shutters was unknown. Although

Fig. 15
New window wall
in the Amsterdam
Canal House Room.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum.



the pine floor could have fitted perfectly in the room, the colour and graining make it too conspicuous. The question is whether this was foreseen.

An approach that clearly differs from the Stedelijk's can be seen in the finish of the surround of one of the two concealed doors. A wooden frame with a shouldered arch was fitted to the inside on a metal frame that forms the passage into a modern exhibition space (fig. 16). Van Duin discusses this in his article.

The entrance to the period room through the two concealed doors instead of the double doors is identical to the arrangement in the Stedelijk Museum. On the outside the closed doors are even concealed behind a stucco wall with paintings (fig. 17). This makes the room an isolated space instead of a room that is architecturally integrated into the surroundings.

Another change in respect of the last presentation in the Stedelijk Museum is the total absence of furniture in the room. The room consequently contrasts with the neighbouring Kops Room, which could be completely furnished with the original furniture. The Rijksmuseum did not opt for a reconstruction with an interpretation of an eighteenth-century interior like that shown in the Stedelijk. The only exception is the presence of a chandelier – and this came from the Rijksmuseum's collection, not the Suasso Collection.⁶⁸ The whereabouts of the fire dogs that graced the hearth in the Stedelijk Museum from 1900 onwards are unknown.

The change in the name of the room is significant. On the museum's floor plan and exhibition boards the period room is called the 'Amsterdam Canal House Room', while the name 'Beuning Room' is used in scholarly publications.⁶⁹ The first emphasizes a general Amsterdam domestic culture, whereas the latter refers to the man who commissioned the room in the eighteenth century. The neighbouring



'Kops Room' is likewise named after the man who ordered it.

The Beuning Room: A Residue of Opinions

The Beuning Room in the Rijksmuseum is presented as a historical interior from the mid-eighteenth century. But is this actually true? If visitors are to understand what they are looking at, it is important to have an insight into the history of its display and the way it was viewed. What we see, after all, is a modern museum construct – the room never looked like this. It was not only Matthijs Beuning and the later residents of 187 Keizersgracht who left their mark on the room; since the move to the Stedelijk

Fig. 16
The metal door frame
of the concealed door.

Museum at the end of the nineteenth century it appeared in a variety of guises because the museological motive changed with each phase. From 1900 to 1971 the 'Mahogany Room' focused on decorative art; from 1971 the 'Louis xv Room' took an art-historical approach where the purity of style and the authenticity of the room and its furnishings were what mattered. This led to an interpretation of eighteenth-century domestic culture. Now art and the decorative arts are again the main focus. The emphasis is on the eighteenth-century material and its present-day interpretation.

Analysis of its history reveals that the room has undergone irreversible structural changes since it was dismantled and removed from the Keizersgracht house. This moment is therefore a benchmark for later museum presentations. The change of context from house to museum and the opinions of curators and conservators have led to important changes in the access to the room, the reconstruction of the window wall and the choice of wall and floor covering.

Ultimately the current presentation of the Beuning Room in the Rijksmuseum is a combination of opinions and presentations that still shows traces of the three previous phases – traces that are sometimes easy to recognize, but much more often are very subtle, sometimes shown deliberately, sometimes not. In the final analysis, the Beuning Room is a museological construct determined by time, context and taste.

Fig. 17
Exterior of the Beuning Room with a plaster wall that conceals the double doors to the left of the entrance door.



NOTES

- * This article is based on the author's MA thesis on the history of the Beuning Room from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. It builds on the various investigations by Reinier Baarsen, Paul van Duin and Richard Harmanni.
- 1 Van Burkom 2001; Fock 2001. Also the more recent publications Boogard 2007, Laan 2012 and Baarsen et al. 2001.
 - 2 Harris 2007.
 - 3 Vickery 2009
 - 4 Eliëns 1996; De Jong 2001; Biemond 2005
 - 5 De Jong 2001, p. 74; Harris 2007, pp. 123-24.
 - 6 De Jong 2001, p. 73; Biemond 2005, p. 25.
 - 7 De Jong 2001, pp. 41-104; De Jong and M. Skougaard 1992, p. 105.
 - 8 Eliëns 1996, p. 40.
 - 9 Biemond 2005, p. 28; Eliëns 1996, p. 40.
 - 10 De Jong 2001, p. 99.
 - 11 Floor plan ground floor building Gemeentemuseum The Hague 1931; various letters from J. van Someren Brand 1896-97; Eliëns 1996, p. 40.
 - 12 Schouten 1968, p. 114.
 - 13 De Jong 2001, p. 73.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Schouten 1968, p. 9.
 - 16 Pijzel-Dommissie 2000, p. 54.
 - 17 Ibid.
 - 18 Biemond 2005, p. 31.
 - 19 Van Someren Brand 1901, pp. 184-90, 251-62, 308-18. The 'room' concept was used by first curator Jan Eduard van Someren Brand.
 - 20 ACA inventories 30041.
 - 21 Stedelijk Museum Report 1897-1902, accession no. 30041, inv. no. 5959.
 - 22 Krabbe and Smit 2004, p. 42. Another reference to the location of the 'period rooms' is found in Baard 1906. Although architect Weissman stated that the east wing, i.e. the left wing, was reserved for the foundation, the *Gids* states that 'the Sophia Augusta Foundation is distributed over the entire lower right wing of the Stedelijk Museum'. Furthermore, the numbering of the period rooms in Roman numerals I to VII differs from the room numbering 12 to 21 on the 1893 floor plan and creates extra confusion (fig. 1). A floor plan dating from the 1860s gives clear insight into the positioning of the galleries, with different numbering yet again. Room 19, instead of 14, is thus the gallery in which the period room is located. Since there was no earlier floor plan of the period rooms available, this floor plan was used to analyse the placement of the period room in the gallery.
 - 23 Baard 1906, foreword.
 - 24 Ter Brugge-Drielsma 2015, pp. 31-48
 - 25 Letter from J. van Someren Brand to the Mayor and Aldermen of Amsterdam, 4 May 1896.
 - 26 The museum was ready and opened while the rooms were placed in the Suasso Wing.
 - 27 Letter from J. van Someren Brand to the Mayor and Aldermen of Amsterdam, 29 January 1896. In January 1896 a request followed to 'be allowed to have the windows from the rear elevation of the property at 187 Keizersgracht. These windows are made of oak and are ideal for making display cases, for which there is presently a great need,' wrote Van Someren Brand.
 - 28 Register card ok.a. 2902, 1976. Measurements 8.46/10.2 x 7.25 m. Strangely enough, this makes it appear as if the Mahogany Room was twenty centimetres longer than gallery 14 (10 x 10 m). The difference probably came about through a different way of measuring that took the window recess into account.
 - 29 Register card ok.a. 17279, 1976. The term 'quasi-Gobelin' was taken from the register card.
 - 30 Baard 1906, p. 23; letter from J. van Someren Brand to the Mayor and Aldermen, June 1897. It emerges from a request by Van Someren Brand to the Mayor and Aldermen in 1897 that he had found a painted wall hanging that supposedly came from Castle Heeswijk. He stated that it could be purchased for 100 guilders. Altering the wall hanging would cost between 195 and 210 guilders.
 - 31 Krabbe and Smit 2004, p. 23.
 - 32 Letter from J. van Someren Brand to the Mayor and Aldermen of Amsterdam, 16 December 1895.
 - 33 Harmanni 1990, p. 46.
 - 34 Harris 2007, p. 2.
 - 35 Letter from Van Someren Brand to The Mayor and Aldermen of Amsterdam, 22 December 1896.
 - 36 Zondagsblad van de Courant, 17 May 1913: an illustrated overview of four of the seven rooms.
 - 37 Handwritten description of gallery VII.
 - 38 Sluyterman 1908, pl. 4.
 - 39 Petersen 2004, p. 18.

- 40 Ibid., p. 19.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Vreeken 2010, pp. 245-46.
- 43 Period rooms chronology; *ibid.*, pp. 245-46, various plans were commissioned by Sandberg, in 1950 by Mart Stam, in 1960 by Bart van Kasteel.
- 44 Vellekoop 1995, p. 3.
- 45 Letter from S.H. Levie to the alderman for art affairs, 8 June 1964.
- 46 'Een stijl zuivere inrichting die gangbaar zou zijn in een ontvangstkamer in voorname herenhuizen is toegevoegd aan de stijlkamer'. Dismantlement logbook.
- 47 Mahogany Room report, date unknown.
- 48 De Vries 1908, p. 109.
- 49 Register number ok.a 17274 and 17279.1 to 7. This supposition is based on the date 8-11-1971 when the quasi-Gobelin and Andriessen's overdoor were placed in the repository.
- 50 Herindeling Stedelijk Museum 1968-1974, SAA, accession no. 30041, inv. no. 781
- 51 Dismantlement logbook. See also the article by Van Duin.
- 52 Register card ok.a 17274, ok.a 17279 1 to 7.
- 53 Adlib system ok.a 2902 to 17279.1-7; register cards ok.a 2902 to 17279.1-7; Van Duin 2014, p. 84.
- 54 Baarsen et al. 2001, p. 13.
- 55 *Ibid.*, pp. 204-08.
- 56 Huisman 2013, pp. 10-23.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 58 Interview with Paul van Duin and Josefina de Fouw, 14 and 17 November 2014; interview with Gusta Reichwein, 4 December 2014.
- 59 Fock 2005, p. 138.
- 60 Draft loan agreement 2006.
- 61 Interview with Gusta Reichwein, 4 December 2014; draft loan agreement 2006; Van Duin 2010, p. 6.
- 62 Meurs et al. 2013, pp. 179-80.
- 63 Why the dimensions of the period room turn out to be larger in the present arrangement than in the set-up in the Stedelijk Museum (8.46/10.2 (bay) x 7.25m) is unknown. Van Duin 2014, p. 84; interview with Paul van Duin and Josefina de Fouw, 14 November 2014).
- 64 Van Duin 2014, p. 86.
- 65 Interview with Reinier Baarsen, June 2015.
- 66 Email correspondence between the author and Mr Brand of Landgoed Twickel in Ambt Delden, 18 December 2014.
- 67 Baarsen et al. 2001, p. 209. Room (1755) at the rear of 170 Herengracht in Amsterdam, Hendrick de Keyser Society. The use of rare mahogany and the elaborate ornamentation of the mahogany panelling could also indicate that a different flooring material, for example oak, was used to cover the cheaper floorboards. This material is also found in the Herengracht room, which dates from the same period. Another argument that raises doubt is the finish of the pine. The yellow colour of the pine does not go well with the reddish hue of the mahogany panelling.
- 68 Email from Paul van Duin, 26 November 2014.
- 69 Van Duin 2010; Van Duin 2014.